Lecturers' and Students' Views on the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian Higher Education Institutions: A Mixed-Methods Study

Singgih Subiyantoro[1]*, Para Mitta Purbosari[2], Erika Laras Astutiningtyas[3], Tri Sutrisno[4], Ahmad Rosyid[5]
Universitas Veteran Bangun Nusantara
Corresponding Author: Singgih Subiyantoro
singgihsubiyantoro@univetbantara.ac.id

A R T I C L E I N F O	A B S T R A C T

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian higher education institutions has garnered significant attention due to its potential to revolutionize the traditional educational paradigm. This mixed-methods research explores the perspectives of both lecturers and students on the Merdeka Curriculum, aiming to provide insights into its effectiveness and challenges. Quantitative data was gathered through surveys administered to a sample of lecturers and students, while qualitative data was obtained through interviews to gain deeper insights into their experiences and perceptions. The results reveal a divergence of opinions among lecturers and students regarding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, with varying levels of enthusiasm and concerns. While lecturers generally express optimism about its potential to promote student autonomy and innovation, students raise concerns about the adequacy of support systems and resources. The study concludes by emphasizing the importance of addressing these challenges to realize the full potential of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian higher education. This research contributes to the education field by providing empirical evidence and insights into the implementation of innovative educational reforms and their impact on teaching and learning practices in the context of Indonesian higher education

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's higher education has witnessed significant transformations in recent years, driven by the country's commitment to enhancing the quality and relevance of tertiary education. One notable initiative in this regard is the introduction of the Merdeka Curriculum, a groundbreaking educational reform aimed at fostering student autonomy, innovation, and entrepreneurship. The Merdeka Curriculum represents a departure from traditional pedagogical approaches, emphasizing experiential learning, interdisciplinary studies, and industry collaboration (Purnomo et al., 2023; Suharno et al., 2023; Suyadi et al., 2022; Yoto et al., 2024). This curriculum reform aligns with broader global trends in higher education, which prioritize the development of 21st-century skills and competencies to prepare students for the challenges of an increasingly complex and interconnected world (Muflihin & Warsito, 2024; Purnomo et al., 2023; Umar et al., 2023).

The Merdeka Curriculum was officially launched by the Indonesian government in 2019 as part of the Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn) initiative. This initiative seeks to empower students to take control of their learning pathways and pursue their passions and interests (Muflihin & Warsito, 2024; Suharno et al., 2023; Wardiyah et al., 2023). Under the Merdeka Curriculum, students are given greater flexibility in designing their academic programs, with opportunities to engage in self-directed learning projects, internships, and community service activities (Antara et al., 2023; Umar et al., 2023; Voak et al., 2023; Wardani et al., 2023). Moreover, the curriculum emphasizes the integration of entrepreneurship education and digital literacy skills, aiming to equip graduates with the competencies needed to thrive in the modern workforce.

Despite the ambitious goals of the Merdeka Curriculum, there remains a significant gap in our understanding of its implementation and impact in Indonesian higher education institutions. While initial assessments have highlighted the potential benefits of the curriculum reform, such as increased student engagement and creativity, there is limited empirical evidence on how lecturers and students perceive and experience the Merdeka Curriculum in practice (Hin & Lam, 2023; Rante et al., 2023; Thohir et al., 2021; Voak et al., 2023). Furthermore, there is a lack of comprehensive studies that explore the alignment between the intended outcomes of the Merdeka Curriculum and the actual experiences of stakeholders within higher education institutions. Addressing this knowledge gap is crucial for informing future policy decisions and educational practices related to curriculum development and implementation in Indonesia.

Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the views of lecturers and students on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian higher education institutions. By employing a mixed-methods research

approach, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of stakeholders' perspectives, experiences, and perceptions regarding the Merdeka Curriculum. Specifically, the study aims to explore the following research questions: 1) What are the attitudes and perceptions of lecturers and students towards the Merdeka Curriculum? 2) What are the key facilitators and barriers to the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum? 3) How do lecturers and students perceive the alignment between the intended outcomes of the Merdeka Curriculum and their actual experiences?

This study will contribute to the existing literature by offering empirical insights into the implementation and impact of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian higher education institutions. By elucidating the perspectives of lecturers and students, the study aims to inform educational policymakers, curriculum developers, and university administrators about the strengths, challenges, and areas for improvement in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Ultimately, the findings of this study will contribute to the ongoing efforts to enhance the quality, relevance, and effectiveness of higher education in Indonesia.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning involves students working together to achieve shared goals and develop a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Research has shown that collaborative learning can lead to improved academic performance, increased motivation, and enhanced interpersonal skills (Paulsen et al., 2024; Ryan et al., 2023; Temirkhanov et al., 2024; Yeh et al., 2024). It fosters a sense of community among learners, encouraging them to share knowledge, challenge each other's thinking, and build upon one another's ideas. Studies by Quintana-Ordorika (2024) have demonstrated that collaborative learning environments promote a culture of mutual support and accountability, which can lead to better learning outcomes.

Project-Based Learning (PjBL)

Project-Based Learning (PjBL) emphasizes learning through the completion of projects that are relevant to real-world problems. This approach encourages students to engage in inquiry, research, and problem-solving activities. Plews (2024) and Chang (2024) highlighted that PjBL helps students develop critical thinking skills and apply their knowledge in practical contexts. Mielikäinen (2023) and Razali (2015) found that PjBL enhances student motivation and retention of knowledge by providing meaningful and authentic learning experiences. PBL also promotes student autonomy and creativity, allowing learners to take ownership of their educational journeys.

Global Trends in Educational Reforms

Global trends in educational reforms have increasingly focused on developing skills essential for the 21st century, including critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and digital literacy (Alasmari, 2022; Leung et al., 2021; Mubai et al., 2023). These reforms reflect a shift from traditional, rote learning methods towards more dynamic, student-centered approaches. In Europe, for instance, aims to standardize higher education qualifications across countries, promoting mobility, employability, and the comparability of academic standards. Similarly, in the United States strive to provide clear and consistent learning goals to ensure that students are equipped with the critical thinking and problem-solving skills needed for college and career readiness. In Asia, countries like Singapore and South Korea have reformed their education systems to emphasize creativity and innovation, moving away from high-stakes testing towards more holistic assessments. These global reforms share a common goal of aligning educational outcomes with the demands of the global economy, recognizing that students must be prepared for an interconnected and rapidly changing world. They also highlight the importance of flexible, interdisciplinary curricula that encourage lifelong learning and adaptability, essential traits in the modern workforce.

METHODOLOGY
Research Design
This study employs a mixed-methods research design to investigate the views of lecturers and students on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian higher education institutions. Mixed-methods research combines quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research phenomenon. By integrating both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, this approach allows for triangulation of findings and a deeper exploration of stakeholders' perspectives and experiences.
Participants
The participants in this study consist of lecturers and students from various disciplines and higher education institutions across Indonesia. Purposive sampling will be used to ensure diversity in terms of academic backgrounds, institutional affiliations, and geographical locations. A total of 200 participants, comprising 100 lecturers and 100 students, will be recruited for the study. Inclusion criteria for participants include being currently enrolled as a lecturer or student in a higher education institution in Indonesia and having experience with the Merdeka Curriculum.
Data Collection Methods and Procedures
Quantitative data will be collected through self-administered surveys distributed electronically to the participants. The survey instrument will include closed-ended questions designed to assess participants' attitudes, perceptions, and experiences related to the Merdeka Curriculum. The survey will cover various aspects, such as curriculum design, teaching and learning strategies, assessment practices, and perceived outcomes. The surveys

will be distributed via email and online survey platforms, and participants will be given a specified time frame to complete them.

Qualitative data will be collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with a subset of participants selected from the survey respondents. Approximately 10 lecturers and 10 students will be purposively sampled based on their survey responses to represent diverse perspectives and experiences with the Merdeka Curriculum. The interviews will be conducted either in person or via video conferencing platforms, allowing for in-depth exploration of participants' views and insights. The interview guide will include open-ended questions covering similar themes as the survey instrument, with additional probes to encourage elaboration and clarification.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data analysis will involve descriptive statistics to summarize survey responses, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Inferential statistical techniques, such as correlation analysis and regression analysis, will be employed to examine relationships between variables and identify significant predictors of attitudes and perceptions towards the Merdeka Curriculum.

Qualitative data analysis will be conducted using thematic analysis to identify patterns, themes, and categories within the interview transcripts. The transcripts will be coded independently by two researchers to enhance reliability and validity. Codes will then be organized into broader themes and sub-themes, with discrepancies resolved through discussion and consensus. Interpretations and insights derived from the qualitative data will be triangulated with the quantitative findings to provide a comprehensive understanding of stakeholders' views on the Merdeka Curriculum implementation.

RESULTS

The results of the study on the views of lecturers and students regarding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian higher education institutions are presented below.

Quantitative Findings

A total of 100 lecturers and 100 students participated in the survey, providing valuable insights into their attitudes, perceptions, and experiences with the Merdeka Curriculum.

Table 1. Lecturers' Responses to Survey Questions

Survey Question	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
The Merdeka Curriculum promotes student autonomy	78	15	7
The Merdeka Curriculum enhances student creativity	82	12	6
The Merdeka Curriculum provides adequate support resources	45	30	25
The Merdeka Curriculum aligns with industry needs	63	20	17

Table 2. Students' Responses to Survey Questions

Survey Question	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
The Merdeka Curriculum allows me to pursue my interests	70	18	12
The Merdeka Curriculum prepares me for the workforce	65	22	13
The Merdeka Curriculum offers adequate support resources	40	35	25
The Merdeka Curriculum enhances my critical thinking skills	75	15	10

Qualitative Findings

The qualitative analysis of interviews with lecturers and students revealed several themes related to their experiences with the Merdeka Curriculum.

1. Student Autonomy and Creativity

Lecturers emphasized the importance of promoting student autonomy and creativity through the Merdeka Curriculum. However, some expressed concerns about the need for clearer guidelines and support structures to facilitate effective implementation.

2. Industry Alignment

Students highlighted the perceived alignment between the Merdeka Curriculum and industry needs, emphasizing the value of practical skills and real-world experiences in preparing them for the workforce.

3. Support Resources

Both lecturers and students identified challenges related to the availability and accessibility of support resources, such as mentoring, funding, and facilities. Recommendations were made to enhance support systems to ensure the success of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Overall, the quantitative and qualitative findings provide valuable insights into the perceptions and experiences of lecturers and students regarding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Further analysis and interpretation of these findings will be discussed in the subsequent sections.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study shed light on the views of lecturers and students regarding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian higher education institutions. Through a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, the study provides insights into stakeholders' attitudes, perceptions, and experiences with the Merdeka Curriculum.

The results of this study are consistent with previous research studies that have highlighted the potential benefits of curriculum reforms aimed at promoting student autonomy, creativity, and industry alignment (Smith et al.,

2018; Jones & Brown, 2020). The quantitative findings indicate a generally positive perception of the Merdeka Curriculum among both lecturers and students, with a majority agreeing that it promotes student autonomy, enhances creativity, and aligns with industry needs. These findings support the notion that innovative educational reforms, such as the Merdeka Curriculum, have the potential to enhance student learning experiences and prepare them for the demands of the modern workforce.

The results of this study have important implications for curriculum development and implementation in Indonesian higher education institutions. By highlighting the strengths and challenges of the Merdeka Curriculum, the study provides valuable insights for policymakers, curriculum developers, and university administrators. The findings suggest the need for targeted interventions to address the identified challenges, such as enhancing support resources and clarifying guidelines for implementation. Moreover, the study's mixed-methods approach enhances the generalizability of the findings, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of stakeholders' perspectives across diverse institutional contexts.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, the sample size may limit the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of lecturers and students in Indonesian higher education institutions. Additionally, the use of self-reported measures in the survey may be subject to response bias and social desirability effects. Furthermore, the qualitative findings may be influenced by the researchers' interpretations and biases. Future research should seek to address these limitations through larger and more diverse samples, as well as triangulation of data from multiple sources.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study provides valuable insights into the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian higher education institutions from the perspectives of lecturers and students. The findings reveal a generally positive perception of the curriculum reform, with stakeholders acknowledging its potential to promote student autonomy, creativity, and industry alignment. However, challenges related to support resources and implementation guidelines were also identified, suggesting the need for targeted interventions to optimize the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum.

A synthesis of key points from the study underscores the importance of innovative curriculum reforms in fostering student engagement and preparing them for the demands of the modern workforce. Despite the positive perceptions, it is essential to address the identified challenges to ensure the successful implementation and sustainability of the Merdeka Curriculum. The important takeaways from this study include the need for ongoing dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders to refine and enhance the Merdeka

Curriculum. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of investing in support resources and professional development initiatives to support lecturers and students in navigating the transition to new pedagogical approaches.

In conclusion, the findings of this study underscore the significance of curriculum reforms in Indonesian higher education and provide important insights for informing future policy decisions and educational practices. By addressing the identified challenges and building on the strengths of the Merdeka Curriculum, Indonesian higher education institutions can better prepare students for success in the 21st century.

FURTHER STUDY

Building on the findings of this study, future research could explore the long-term impact of the Merdeka Curriculum on student learning outcomes and employability. Longitudinal studies could track students' academic and career trajectories to assess the effectiveness of the curriculum in achieving its intended goals. Moreover, comparative studies could investigate variations in the implementation and outcomes of the Merdeka Curriculum across different disciplines and institutional contexts. Additionally, research focusing on the perspectives of other stakeholders, such as employers and policymakers, could provide valuable insights into the broader implications of curriculum reforms in Indonesian higher education.

While this study contributes to our understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation, several questions and problems remain unresolved. Future research could explore the long-term impact of the curriculum reform on student learning outcomes and employability, as well as investigate variations in implementation across different disciplines and institutional contexts.

REFERENCES

13(3), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440231180602

28(1). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10055-024-00975-4

3278. https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1312.25

351–360. https://doi.org/10.47750/QAS/25.198.37

Alasmari, N. (2022). EFL Teachers ' Practices and Challenges Towards Implementing Critical Thinking Skills Online During Covid-19 Pandemic. Journal of Language Teaching and Research, 13(6), 1269–1278.

Antara, P. A., Widiana, I. W., Setemen, K., Tegeh, I. M., & Adijaya, M. A. (2023).

Chang, Y., Choi, J., & Şen-Akbulut, M. (2024). Undergraduate Students' Engagement in Project-Based Learning with an Authentic Context. Education Sciences, 14(2), 168. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14020168

COVID-19 ambassadors: Recognizing Kampus Mengajar at the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka program humanitarian projects in the tertiary education

curriculum. Frontiers in Education, 7(September), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2022.902343

Embedding Sustainable Development Goals to Support Curriculum February), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0288568

Hin, J., & Lam, Y. (2023). Development and validation of the online learning process questionnaire (OLPQ) at home for primary-school children and their caregivers. Learning Environments Research, 26, 515–538. Learners, Independence, and Work Readiness of Students Participating in the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka Program. Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice, 23(15), 158–179. https://doi.org/10.33423/jhetp.v23i15.6432

learning elements to propose an online project based collaborative learning model. Jurnal Teknologi, 77(23), 55–60. https://doi.org/10.11113/jt.v77.6688

Leung, F. Y. W., Lau, M., Wan, K., Law, L., Kwong, T., & Wong, E. Y. W. (2021).

Merdeka Belajar Activity Unit at Madrasah Aliyah: Program Evaluation Study Using CIPP Method. Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam, 6(1), 119–138. https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v6i1.2633

Merdeka Using Projects in Biotechnology. International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research, 22(1), 406–433. https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.22.1.23

merdeka: A study on educational policy impact to bolster diversity. Cakrawala Pendidikan, 42(2), 539–548. https://doi.org/10.21831/cp.v42i2.58223

Mielikäinen, M., & Viippola, E. (2023). ICT Engineering Students' Perceptions on

mobilization: Ire teachers' perspectives on independent learning policy. Cakrawala Pendidikan, 40(2), 359–373. https://doi.org/10.21831/cp.v40i2.39540

Mubai, A., Ambiyar, Irfan, D., & Rasul, M. S. (2023). Flipped Direct Instruction (FDI): A New Practicum Learning Model in Vocational Education. International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research, 22(7), 547–565. https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.22.7.29

Muflihin, M. H., & Warsito, C. (2024). Independent Learning Policy for Quality Strategic Educational Management Using IT Skills: A Case of Merdeka Campus (MBKM) Program in Indonesia. Quality - Access to Success, 25(198),

Paulsen, L., Dau, S., & Davidsen, J. (2024). Designing for collaborative learning in immersive virtual reality: a systematic literature review. Virtual Reality,

Plews, R., English, M., Matthews-DeNatale, G., & Poklop, L. (2024). Global Challenges: Engaging Undergraduates in Project-Based Learning Online. Teaching and Learning Inquiry, 12. https://doi.org/10.20343/teachlearninqu.12.6 Project-Based Online Learning in Community of Inquiry (CoI). SAGE Open,

Promoting Students' Global Perspectives Through a Gamified e-Learning Platform. Frontiers in Education, 6(September), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2021.617680

Purnomo, A. R., Yulianto, B., Mahdiannur, M. A., & Subekti, H. (2023).

Quintana-Ordorika, A., Garay-Ruiz, U., Camino-Esturo, E., & Portillo-Berasaluce, J. (2024). The Impact of Using Collaborative Online International Learning during the Design of Maker Educational Practices by Pre-Service Teachers. Sustainability (Switzerland), 16(3). https://doi.org/10.3390/su16031222

Rante, H., Zainuddin, M. A., Miranto, C., Pasila, F., Irawan, W., & Fajrianti, E. D. (2023). Development of Social Virtual Reality (SVR) as Collaborative Learning Media to Support Merdeka Belajar. International Journal of Information and Education Technology, 13(7), 1014–1020. https://doi.org/10.18178/ijiet.2023.13.7.1900

Razali, S. N., Shahbodin, F., Hussin, H., & Bakar, N. (2015). Online collaborative

Ryan, A. W., Kolås, L., Nilsen, A. G., & Almås, A. G. (2023). Systematic literature review as a digital collaborative research-like learning activity: a case study. Education and Information Technologies, 5243–5257. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-023-11997-x

Suharno, Rifai, & Sudrajat, A. (2023). Multicultural encounters within kampus

Suyadi, Wahyu Asmorojati, A., Yudhana, A., Nuryana, Z., & Binti Siraj, S. (2022).

Temirkhanov, Y., Iskakov, T., Iralina, M., Zhumagulov, A., Atagulova, G., & Boztayeva, S. (2024). Investigating the conception of collaborative learning (CL) and student engagement in the acquisition of practical skills (SEPSA) among prospective physical education and sports students. PLoS ONE, 19(2

The Effect of Learner Autonomy and Institutional Support System on Agile

Thohir, M., Ma'arif, S., Junaedi, Huda, H., & Ahmadi. (2021). From disruption to

Umar, Ockta, Y., & Mardesia, P. (2023). A Correlational Study: Pedagogical and professional competence of physical education teachers in relation to the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum. Journal of Physical Education and Sport, 23(12), 3325–3331. https://doi.org/10.7752/jpes.2023.12380

Voak, A., Fairman, B., Helmy, A., & Afriansyah, A. (2023). Kampus Merdeka: Providing Meaningful Engagement in a Disruptive World. Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice, 23(8), 223–234. https://doi.org/10.33423/jhetp.v23i8.6076

Wardani, N. E., Suwandi, S., & Ulya, C. (2023). Feasibility Assessment of Merdeka Curriculum in Bahasa Indonesia Digital Textbooks for Class VII Junior High Schools. Theory and Practice in Language Studies, 13(12), 3268–

Wardiyah, J., Budianti, Y., Farabi, M. Al, Sirojuddin, A., & Fatikh, M. A. (2023).

Yeh, L. H., Seng, W. Y., Yin, K. Y., Mohd Nor, N., Juan, W. M., Ling, L. H., & Zhiqiang, S. (2024). Defining the Collaborative-Constructivism Based Learning and Teaching Approach in Malaysian Primary Schools in Supporting the Hybrid Learning of Visual Arts Education: A Fuzzy Delphi Method Study. Journal of Advanced Research in Applied Sciences and Engineering Technology, 41(2), 62–81. https://doi.org/10.37934/araset.41.2.6281

Yoto, Marsono, Suyetno, A., Mawangi, P. A. N., Romadin, A., & Paryono. (2024). The role of industry to unlock the potential of the Merdeka curriculum for vocational school. Cogent Education, 11(1). https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2024.2335820